

Biden's supposed path to peace is only escalating the war in Ukraine, and other Western leaders seem eager to join a major war with Russia — we desperately need a plan B, write

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**P**RESIDENT Joe Biden began his State of the Union speech on March 7 with an impassioned warning that failing to pass his \$61 billion weapons package for Ukraine “will put Ukraine at risk, Europe at risk, the free world at risk.”

But even if the president's request were suddenly passed, it would only prolong, and dangerously escalate, the brutal war that is destroying Ukraine.

The assumption of the Western political elite that their leaders had a viable plan to defeat Russia and restore Ukraine's pre-2014 borders has proven to be one more triumphalist US dream that has turned into a nightmare. Ukraine has joined North Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and now Gaza, as another shattered monument to US military madness.

This could have been one of the shortest wars in history if US and Britain had just supported a peace and neutrality agreement negotiated in Turkey in March and April 2022 that already had champagne corks popping in Kiev, according to Ukrainian negotiator Oleksiy Arestovych. Instead, they chose to prolong and escalate the war as a chance to defeat and weaken Russia.

Two days before Biden's State of the Union speech, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced the early retirement of Acting Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, one of the officials most responsible for a decade of disastrous US policy toward Ukraine.

Two weeks before the announcement of Nuland's retirement at the age of 62, she acknowledged in a talk at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) that the war in Ukraine had degenerated into a war of attrition that she compared to the first world war, and she admitted that the US government had no plan B for Ukraine if Congress doesn't cough up \$61 billion for more weapons.

We don't know whether Nuland was forced out, or perhaps quit in protest over a policy that she fought for and lost.

Either way, her ride into the sunset opens the door for others to fashion a badly needed plan B for Ukraine.

The imperative must be to chart a path back from this hopeless but ever-escalating war of attrition to the negotiating table that the US and Britain upended in April 2022 — or at least to new negotiations on the basis that President Volodymyr Zelensky defined on March 27 2022, when he told his people: “Our goal is obvious: peace and the restoration of normal life in our native state as soon as possible.”

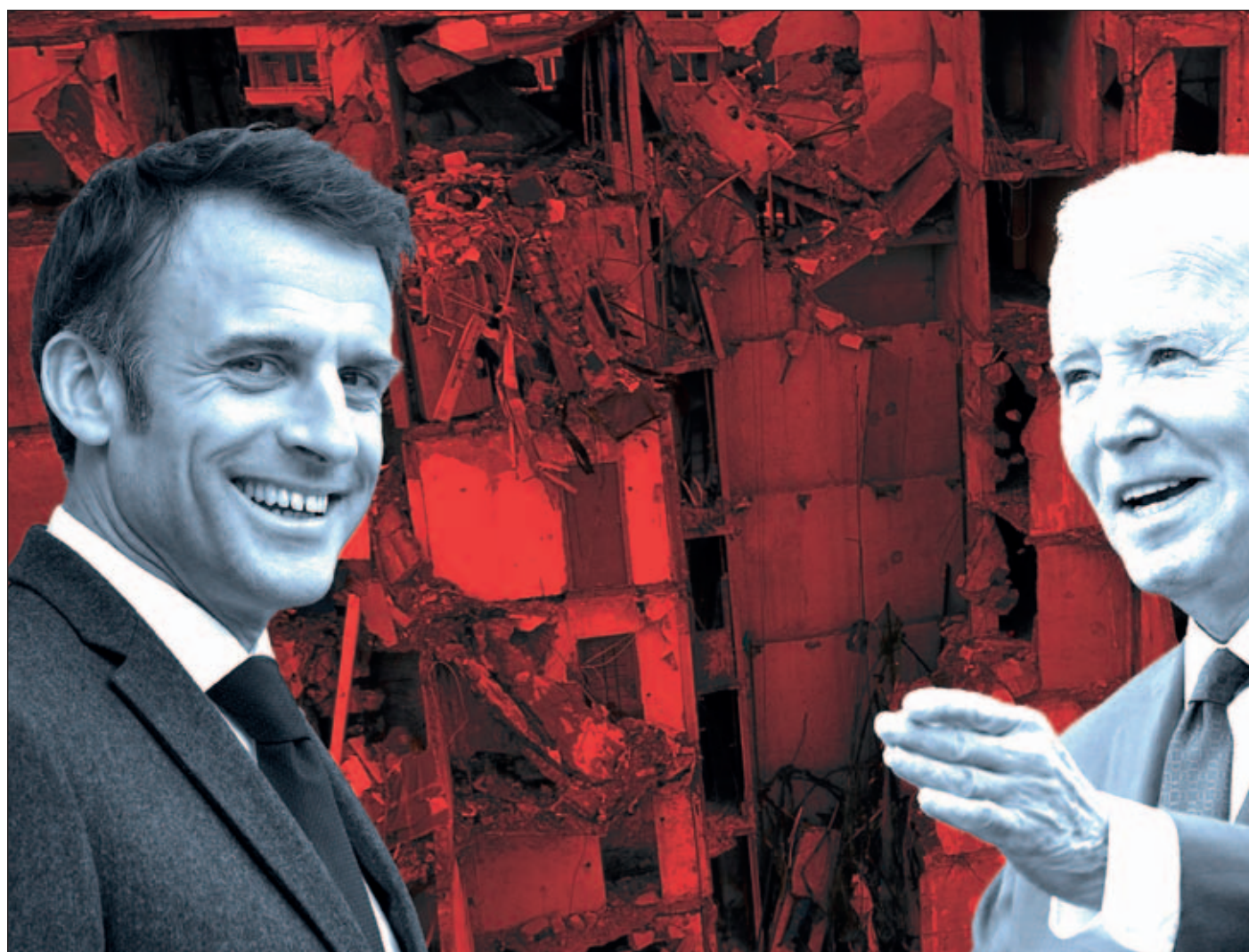
Instead, on February 26, in a very worrying sign of where Nato's current policy is leading, French President Emmanuel Macron revealed that European leaders meeting in Paris discussed sending larger numbers of Western ground troops to Ukraine.

Macron pointed out that Nato members have steadily increased their support to levels unthinkable when the war began. He highlighted the example of Germany, which offered Ukraine only helmets and sleeping bags at the outset of the conflict and is now saying Ukraine needs more missiles and tanks.

“The people that said “never ever” today were the same ones who said never ever planes, never ever long-range missiles, never ever trucks. They said all that two years ago,” Macron recalled. “We have to be humble and realise that we [have] always been six to eight months late.”

Macron implied that, as the war escalates, Nato countries may eventually have to deploy their own forces to Ukraine, and he argued that they should do so sooner rather than later if they want to recover the initiative in the war.

The mere suggestion of Western troops fighting in Ukraine elicited an outcry both within France — from extreme right National Rally to leftist La France Insoumise — and from other Nato countries. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz insisted that participants in the meeting were “unanimous” in their opposition to deploying troops. Russian officials warned that



**SABRE-RATTLING:** Emmanuel Macron (left) and Joe Biden

# Are we stumbling into World War III in Ukraine?

such a step would mean war between Russia and Nato.

But as Poland's president and prime minister headed to Washington for a White House meeting on February 12, Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski told the Polish parliament that sending Nato troops into Ukraine “is not unthinkable.”

Macron's intention may have been precisely to bring this debate out into the open and put an end to the secrecy surrounding the undeclared policy of gradual escalation toward full-scale war with Russia that the West has pursued

for two years.

Macron failed to mention publicly that, under current policy, Nato forces are already deeply involved in the war. Among many lies that President Biden told in his State of the Union speech, he insisted that “there are no US soldiers at war in Ukraine.”

However, the trove of Pentagon documents leaked in March 2023 included an assessment that there were already at least 97 Nato special forces troops operating in Ukraine, including 50 British, 14 US and 15 French.

National Security Council

spokesman Admiral John Kirby has also acknowledged a “small US military presence” based in the US embassy in Kiev to try to keep track of thousands of tons of US weapons as they arrive in Ukraine.

But many more Nato forces, whether inside or outside Ukraine, are involved in planning Ukrainian military operations; providing satellite intelligence; and playing essential roles in the targeting of the weapons they have sent. A Ukrainian official told the Washington Post that Ukrainian forces hardly ever

fire Himars rockets without precise targeting data provided by US forces in Europe.

All these Nato forces are most definitely “at war in Ukraine.” To be at war in a country with only small numbers of “boots on the ground” has been a hallmark of 21st century US and Nato war-making, as any navy pilot on an aircraft carrier or drone operator in Nevada can attest. It is precisely this doctrine of “limited” and proxy war that is at risk of spinning out of control in Ukraine, unleashing the World War III that President Biden has vowed to avoid.